Public Pools and Spas Recognized for Health, Safety

Local health officials honored the operators of 12 licensed pools, spas, and other water features Thursday for their efforts to protect public health and safety.

Staff of the Licensed Establishment Program of Lewis and Clark Public Health presented “Gold and Silver Buoy Awards” to the operators following the regular meeting of the City-County Board of Health.

This was the fifth year the public health department has issued the awards, which recognize operators of public, recreational water features (pools, hot tubs, and water parks) who provide a clean, healthy, and safe environment. The awards are based on annual inspections by public health sanitarians of 57 licensed water facilities in Lewis and Clark County.

This year’s winners represent just over 20 percent of all licensed pools and spas in Lewis and Clark County.

“Our purpose in doing inspections is to prevent disease and injury by evaluating water quality, clarity, and facility safety,” said Laurel Riek, supervisor of the Licensed Establishment Program. “Operating a pool or spa is complicated and requires specialized training, as well as time and attention. These awards honor those facilities that maintain safe and comfortable water chemistry even with the challenges of sporadic heavy use, ventilation in indoor areas, and weather in outdoor areas.”

Gold Buoy Awards were presented to:

- Capital City Health Club (lap pool)
- City of East Helena (Kennedy Park swimming pool)
- City of Helena (Last Chance Splash Waterpark and Pool splash deck)
- Helena Holiday Inn Express (pool)
- Shodair Hospital (pool)

Silver Buoy Awards were presented to:
• Capital City Health Club (recreational pool and spa)
• City of Helena (Last Chance Splash Waterpark and Pool lazy river)
• Helena Family YMCA (pool)
• Helena Holiday Inn Express (spa)
• Leisure Village Mobile Home Park (pool and spa)

To qualify for a Buoy Award, operators had to meet these criteria:

• Few to no violations identified during an inspection
• Water chemistry that’s comfortable and safe for swimmers
• Good water clarity
• Safe water temperatures (spas)
• Required rescue equipment, lifeguards (if needed), and CPR certification
• Regular monitoring, corrective action, and well-maintained records that track water chemistry and actions taken to maintain the pool (including closing the pool until it’s safe for swimmers)
• Staff trained in pool operation
• Adequate ventilation and indoor air quality

“Gold Buoy winners have complete records, consistent monitoring and no more than two noncritical violations during an inspection, and that’s a standard that’s difficult to meet,” Riek said. “Silver Buoy winners must have almost complete records of monitoring and minimal violations. The expectation is that pools are maintained every day to prevent waterborne illness.”